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ABSTRACT

Three areas are addressed in this paper: the family-in-crisis motif; the family as educator; and parent education. (1) The family in crisis: The family-in-crisis motif pervades both professional and popular commentary on the contemporary American family. There are powerful continuities in our perception of the American family crisis in every decade of the 20th century. (2) The family as educator: Most educational history during the past century has focused on the public school as society's chief "culture factory" and agency of "social reproduction." The study of the family as educator remains largely outside the mainstream of educational history. Unique among educational historians, Cremin's concept of educational configuration calls attention to the central role of families as educators. (3) Parent education: Parent education is a wholly inadequate organizing principle for comprehending or remedying the problems which parents as educators face today. Proponents of parent education tend to see parent education as a solution for deeply-rooted social problems; to exaggerate the power of parents alone to control their children's destinies; to delimit woman's potential social contribution to the domestic sphere without placing corresponding constraints on men; and to be naively subservient to the latest findings of psychological science. There are indications of several parallels in parent education between the 1920's and the present. (Author/RH)

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Family as Educator, Parent Education, and the Perennial Family Crisis

I have been asked to provide the participants of this conference with a historical perspective on two main themes, the "family as educator" and "parent education." As will become evident, I believe these two themes are far from being identical; indeed, as they are commonly discussed, there is a fundamental tension, if not actual conflict, between them which ought to become a focal point of our discussions. As will also become apparent, I do not believe that history, while an invaluable and underutilized tool by policymakers, is better able than any other discipline to eliminate bias and provide "objective" insights into current social problems. It may therefore help you to know in advance my "angle of vision," my prior research concerns and current research agenda, so that you can easily ferret out my biases as I examine portions of our historical experience.

I come to this conference as a historian of education interested primarily in the evolution of child and family life during the past four centuries, and in the growth of public institutions designed to integrate the young, especially poor, minority youth, into the cultural and economic mainstream. In the last few years my research has concentrated on the emergence of the juvenile justice system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and on the genesis of formal and informal methods of parent education during the past century. As you may know, I have appraised policies in both fields rather criticially, as poorly designed, clumsily implemented, sex biased, and woefully inappropriate to the problems they were created to alleviate.[1] But I write not simply as a critic but as a concerned participant in current programmatic thinking in both fields. Under the sponsorship of the National Congress of Parent and Teachers, for example,

I coordinated and edited a self-instructional pamphlet series, Today's Family in Focus, to help parents better understand the role of the family in the modern world, and to facilitate their access to and control over resources directly related to family goals.[2] And, a final piece of clearly relevant experience, I recently had the good fortune to serve as a research associate in women's studies at the Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College. My tenure at the Institute has heightened my awareness of the centrality of sex bias and stereotyping in our culture, institutions, and social policies, past and present.

I have several goals in this paper, none of which, given space limitations and time constraints, can be developed as fully as it should. The paper is in three main parts. Section one seeks to lay an unconventional intellectual foundation for understanding our surging interest in "parents as educators." In abbreviated form and without mountainous documentation, I want to suggest that we are witnessing today only the latest outburst of an enduring malaise in American social commentary on the family, which I dub the "family-in-crisis syndrome." The issues here are terribly complex, the role of historical scholarship in illuminating them unusually subtle and intricate. All I expect to accomplish now is to stimulate dialogue and justify additional research. In section two, I want to elaborate briefly on the concept of "family as educator" by demonstrating its heuristic value for my own discipline, the history of education. And in section three, I want to offer an overview of the early years of American parent education, partly for the intrinsic value of historical perspective but also to spotlight basic issues which remain largely unresolved and central to the parent education enterprise today.

The Perennial Family Crisis[3]

The family-in-crisis motif pervades both professional and popular commentary on the contemporary American family. In reviewing some of this vast and growing literature, I was surprised by the close convergence, in tone and in content, between the observations of scholars and pundits of the popular media. Perhaps this should not have been surprising: after all, one definition of "panic" might be a mass reaction that envelops all equally. If the family is falling apart as rapidly as many commentators think (if it has not disintegrated already), then the current spate of jeremiads may indeed be in order, and woe be to the nay-sayers. But I remain skeptical. As a historian of education and of juvenile justice, I recognize a familiar ring in much of this rhetoric, and feel a sense of deja vu, of redundancy. I would draw a parallel between the twentieth-century "family-in-crisis syndrome" and the course of nineteenth century evangelical religion--periodic outbursts of unusual religious fervor which stand apart but whose significance can be appreciated only as part of an ongoing spirit of religious revivalism throughout the century. Similarly with the rhetoric of family-in-crisis: it has long been with us but, caught up in the latest fervor, the latest rediscovery of forces of evil in our midst, we put aside and selectively forget our earlier experiences, curse our fate, exhort our leaders (now likely to be social scientists rather than ministers) for cures, and pray for revitalization of basic values and institutions.

I know from personal experience that there are many who regard any attempt to downplay today's family crisis as somehow ethically bankrupt and socially irresponsible. But this misses the point: if there are powerful continuities in our perception of family crisis, these inevitably cast a different light on our present predicament and should not be ignored or

interpreted as evidence of callousness. Not in the least do I deny the urgency of current family problems. I am painfully aware of the unfulfilled needs of poor children and the frustrations of their parents. And I too am appalled by an economic and social system that fails to regulate those amorphous "circumstances" Bronfenbrenner rightly condemns as inimical to family vitality.[4] Furthermore, I have internalized to the point of exhaustion what the statistical indicators have to say about recent trends in the structure and context of family life. Nonetheless, it is essential to point up that statistics--no matter how balefully presented in the raw--never speak for themselves but only through interpreters. Historical perspective may provide a much-needed buffer to fears easily induced by our national mesmerization with DATA, our characteristically American fascination with evidence of decline, and our nostalgic attachment to the family of yore.

Let me make three separate points about the statistics on family decline now being cited endlessly, as self-evident truths, by many commentators. First, the data presented are often incomplete, can be rearranged to suggest different conclusions, and can be allied with other relevant data to lead to nearly opposite interpretations--tactics Mary Jo Bane has employed ingeniously in her book, Here to Stay (which I shall comment on again shortly). Second, it is remarkably difficult to determine the point at which fluctuations in long-term processes of social change merit the label "radical"; whether demographic indicators can ever be used to explain psychological distress in individual parents and children; whether people themselves actually perceive these changes as bearing directly on them and inducing "crisis" in their family lives; and whether, perhaps, initial sharp breaks from social norms, even if seemingly "small" in retrospect, better warrant description as "crisis situations" than later increases in magnitude of the

same phenomena (I think, for example, of the large relative increase in number of divorces and women working in the Progressive era, both widely cited then as portending moral and social chaos).

These analytical problems have always intrigued me, but I recall becoming particularly attentive to them after reading Alvin Toffler's Future Shock.[5] In his Introduction Toffler appeared to show some awareness of how difficult it is to compare, qualitatively, the impact of social change on human beings from one generation to the next; but then, throwing caution to the wind, he spent the next five hundred plus pages doing just that, assuming everyone could agree on the "critical point" at which people no longer adapt to change but are merely numbed by it. I find a similar problem in a book more relevant to our conference concerns, Kenneth Keniston's All Our Children. After a bow to the family crisis experienced by second generation Puritans in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, he writes: "What is new and very American is the intensity of the malaise, the sense of having no guidelines or supports for raising children, the feeling of not being in control as parents, and the widespread sense of personal guilt for what seems to be going awry."[6] Well, how do we really know this? Certainly statistics alone cannot sustain the argument--"malaise," "guidelines," "supports," "guilt," "not being in control": these are obviously subjective perceptions and, whether accurate or not, clearly have their counterparts in the laments of earlier generations. And, not to belabor the point, I remind you of Margaret Mead's marvelous insight in her piece on grandparents in The Family as Educator, where she suggests that the current generation may actually be experiencing less disruptive changes than previous ones, and may consequently be less well off for it.[7]

The third and final point is simply a more systematic presentation of what I have been saying all along: I see little novelty in perceptions of family crisis today, either in tone or content. Not only have social commentators on the family traveled this road before but, in fact, they have been traveling this very road virtually without interruption for quite some time. Indeed, I can think of no decade in the twentieth century when, to experts and popular writers, the family did not appear either on the verge of collapse (the pessimists) or of radical readjustment (the optimists). The vast majority of writers on the family have always seen its Armageddon just around the historical corner. Certainly this was the case in pre-World War One America, when the nation's leading social reformers bewailed the demise of traditional family life and created numerous new social mechanisms--juvenile courts, visiting teachers, social workers, mothers' pensions, (now AFDC), for instance--to cope with the changes. Certainly this was true of the 1920s, when moral disintegration and the triumph of a hedonistic culture, led by self-satisfied parents and self-indulgent children, seemed imminent. Certainly this was true of the 1930s, when economic deterioration threatened family foundations as never before, and when widespread joblessness among males attenuated traditional definitions of sex roles. Certainly this was true of the 1940s, when families were shaken by war-time separations and post-war adjustments, and when the plague of juvenile delinquency struck many commentators as a new blot on the American landscape, symbolic testimony to and literal retribution for the decline of parental authority. Certainly this was true of the 1950s--if only we could cast aside the haze of nostalgia now befogging our recollection--when gang delinquency reached all-time prominence among lower-class youth and when the peer group took over (so it was commonly alleged) primary socialization functions from the

moribund family. And certainly--how can we forget!--this was true of the 1960s, when it became fair sport to blame the family for producing rudderless, nihilistic youth seeking only the latest high.

In each evaluation there was doubtless much truth and equally much nonsense, but that is not my point, which is simply that counterparts to today's family-in-crisis warnings have appeared again and again during the course of this century, and dire statistics have always been available to "prove" the case. Why this has been so I shall not attempt to explain now, although it may have much to do with a vested interest among social scientists--the principal successors to ministers as sources of authority in child rearing--to call attention to and diagnose social ills which only they, presumably, possess the expertise to cure. But whatever the underlying causes, and whatever the particular set of family-in-crisis data offered as proof, the lament is a commonplace of modern experience. If there is a family crisis, it appears to be perennial. Dare I suggest, therefore, that one group of priorities in family research be to chart with some precision the various ways Americans have perceived the family, to assess the impact of changing perceptions on social policies, and to attempt to understand, with the advantage of hindsight, which perceptions were more or less accurate and why.

As I mentioned earlier, Mary Jo Bane has tried to buck the tide of the family-in-crisis literature, and in the most "modern" way possible, i.e., via statistical analysis. I do not in the least underestimate the originality of Bane's contribution, but I would like to offer three observations about Here to Stay so as to better comprehend its place in the historical stream of commentary on the American family.

First, Bane's work is clearly not the first to counter the prophets of family doom. Several sensitive writers on family readjustment in the early years of this century, Jane Addams most prominently, were certain that family attachments were irreplaceable and would remain central to human experience, however much family forms changed. This was also true of the family sociologists who came to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, led by Ernest Burgess, who argued that ties of affection had replaced economic necessity as the lynchpin of family identity, and that nostalgia over the old-time family was pointless and self-indulgent. Second, Bane's conclusions rest largely on statistical evidence, brilliantly manipulated and analyzed, but "mere" numbers nonetheless. There are, to be sure, a number of ethnographic studies which sustain Bane's broad argument--especially Laura Lein's Working Family Project, which examined dual-worker families of moderate means in Boston and revealed the lengths to which they would go to maintain traditional family values under difficult circumstances.[8] But the methodology of Here to Stay still raises a basic doubt: how confidently can we infer states of mind about millions of people, their intimate feelings about family relationships, from the data of demographic analysis? Bane is surely sensitive to this difficulty, but it nonetheless places a serious restriction on the reliability of her family portrait. Here, especially, subjective experience is at least as central as "objective," statistical description in analyzing social reality.

This leads to a third and final point. Bane relies heavily on very recent historical research, nearly all of which employs sophisticated statistical indicators to "reconstitute" family structures. I find much virtue in this interdisciplinary borrowing, and Bane is quite right to spotlight such revolutionary studies as those by Peter Laslett, which make it doubtful

that extended families ever existed in Western culture on a large scale. But interdisciplinary borrowing often brings problems as well, and Bane may be more willing than most historians to generalize with an air of finality from very limited research studies still at a beginning stage of development. In reading Here to Stay, I was reminded of the sensation created by Margaret Mead's early studies of Samoa and New Guinea, and how quickly popularizers and scholars from other disciplines latched onto her work in order to disprove all prior research dealing with biological imperatives in human development. Likewise with Bane: the historical studies she cites are indeed relevant to her conclusions on the state of the family today, and her arguments certainly reinforce my own. But, in my judgment, the available historical data are probably not substantial enough to merit such broad and definitive comparisons of past and present (for example: "there has been no significant emancipation of teenagers from their families," or "the data on marriage and divorce suggest that the kind of marriage Americans have always known is still a pervasive and enduring institution.").[9] What Bane's imaginative scholarship does "prove," though, is the potential of historical research to illuminate current policy issues, and the need for increased financial support to such basic and, in the best sense, relevant scholarship.

Families as Educators: The View from Educational History

I turn now to the theme of "family as educator" and its promise, as a new conceptual orientation, for the study of American educational history.[10]

One point should be made clear from the beginning: concern for understanding the family's role as educator is not now in the mainstream of educational history, nor am I confident it will become so in the near future.

Most educational history during the past century has focused on the public school, with minimal attention paid to relationships between schooling and children's prior and later life experiences. Attempts to broaden this focus date back to the early 1960s when Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin sharply criticized the tendency to equate schooling with all of education,[11] but their efforts to reorient the field--at least in my judgment--have largely failed. To explain why in depth would take us too far afield, but one obvious reason has to do with the political climate in which educational scholarship developed over the past decade and a half. Just as Bailyn and Cremin began to urge historians to inquire systematically into the wide range of institutions which educate, radical new interpretations of the origins and purposes of public schools appeared which seemed more immediately "relevant" to ongoing political battles surrounding the schools. So, while important changes in educational historiography have occurred in recent years, they are associated more with the work of "radical revisionists," whose chief spokesperson has been Michael Katz, rather than with Bailyn and Cremin.[12]

There is no denying the major contribution "radical revisionists" have made to our comprehension of school origins, structures, and functions in American history. However overtly the political biases of these writers shaped their reconstruction of the past, they discovered gaps between intent and outcome which previous writers had neglected or obscured, and offered new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of schooling which have only begun to be explored. Nonetheless "radical revisionists," like the writers they attacked, have been guilty of tunnel vision: most have assumed the omnipotence of schooling in children's overall educational experience, and have portrayed the school as society's chief "culture factory" and agency of "social reproduction." "Radical revisionists"--

best represented now by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America[13]--still dominate the field. Other strands of historical research, however, have suggested the centrality of familial education in children's overall development and pointed the way to new historical understanding of families as educators. Surely the most flamboyant recent scholarship to call attention to families as educators--if not the most persuasive--is that of the psychohistorians, who argue, a priori, that family experience has always been the critical variable in explaining personal development and perhaps even social change as well, and who employ a variety of psychological theories to help them determine the dynamics of those processes.[14] In immigration history, to give a more conventional example, the tendency is away from the stress of an earlier generation of historians on the "uprooted," disoriented paterfamilias upon arrival in this country, and instead on the continuing strength and vitality of family experiences in the process of personal and social adjustment. Timothy Smith, Josef Barton, and John Briggs have done especially resourceful research demonstrating the impact of immigrant family values on children's educational aspirations and achievements, and in the process have revealed the inadequacy of one of the "radical revisionists," main contentions, namely, that public schooling was an unwelcome "imposition" on the immigrant poor.[15] To my mind, though, the singlemost revealing body of historical research to indicate the importance of families as educators is that on ante-bellum slavery. Probing imaginatively into documentary evidence of various sorts left by slaves themselves, scholars such as John Blassingame, Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, and Thomas Webber have taught us how to look at repressive institutions from the clientele's point of view--"from the bottom up"--and have thereby demonstrated how slave families remained vital educational

institutions for the transmission of African culture and strategies of survival.[16] Allied to other equally vital institutions indigenous to the quarter community, the slave family inculcated knowledge and values essential to the maintenance of individual integrity, mediated confusing and painful experiences generated outside and within the quarter community, and served as a cultural buffer, spiritual resource, and reservoir of unqualified affection. That scholars have now discovered the potency of familial education under conditions of slavery, where they had previously assumed that slave families did not even exist, ought to serve as impressive forewarning that we are unlikely to make sense of children's past educational experiences unless we pay heed to how and what they were taught at home.

I stated earlier that study of the family as educator remains largely outside the mainstream of educational history. But one leading educational historian, Lawrence Cremin, has been arguing for and developing his ideas on this subject for a decade and a half. One cannot easily summarize Cremin's contribution, in part due to its complexity and subtlety but also because he has yet to complete the illustration of his theoretical ideas in a projected three-volume history of American education. To be sure, his first volume, American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783, gives some indication of how radically different the subject can begin to look when the historian does not fixate on public schooling.[17] But it is also true that the educational functions of the colonial family were already well-appreciated by many historians, if not by the bulk of educational historians. Thus the truly transforming potential of Cremin's stress on families and communities as educators will become evident in his succeeding volumes, and I should like to outline now the main elements of his approach.[18]

Four components of Cremin's approach are most relevant here. First is a latitudinarian definition of education which has undergone a number of refinements in the past several years, and which in its latest form reads: education is "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities, and any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended."[19] Second is an institutional elaboration of that definition, what Cremin calls an "educational configuration." While designed to encompass and establish linkages among the entire range of educative agencies in operation at particular time periods, the concept is fluid rather than static and easily accommodates changes over time. It endeavors to include pervasive, nationwide patterns of institutional development, as well as regional and local variations. It seeks to explain shifting relationships among individual institutions comprising any single configuration (home,school, and church, for instance), as well as to explain interactions among holistic configurations (between the several reinforcing educational institutions run by the Quakers in mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia, and the institutions run by the non-Quaker majority, for example). As Cremin writes on this latter point, "Configurations of education also interact, as configurations, with the society of which they are part."[20] Finally, the concept attempts to account for both consonance and dissonance within and between educational configurations: as, for instance, when families teach one attitude toward money and peers teach another; or when, as in many small towns along the nineteenth century frontier, family, church, school, and workplace taught similar orientations to life without encountering conflicting messages from competing educative agencies.

Complementing the concept of educational configuration is that of "educational biography," through which Cremin seeks to accomplish two things. First, at the level of the individual, to show what it was like to grow up under the influence of different educational configurations; and second, to view the learner as an active agent in his own education rather than, as in much educational writing, a passive participant. The fourth component of Cremin's approach to which I call your attention is the case study which, like the educational biography, tries to make vivid the concept of educational configuration by describing it in terms of concrete community experiences. In his volume on the nineteenth century, Cremin will analyze the evolution of educational configurations in New York City; Lowell, Massachusetts; Macoupin County, Illinois; and Sumter County, South Carolina. Each of these regionally and structurally distinct communities has been chosen because it embodies characteristic educational configurations unique to the century. By examining the life histories of selected individuals who came of age in these communities, Cremin hopes to demonstrate dramatically, on the one hand, how educational configurations invariably shape the boundaries of collective educational experience, and, on the other hand, how different individuals utilize learning opportunities with varying degrees of energy and imagination and thereby express their own personalities, needs, and purposes.

As should be apparent, each component of Cremin's approach calls attention to the central role of families as educators. But, equally important, each also reveals the inadequacy of viewing familial education in isolation from other educative agencies. No more than schools should families become isolated foci of historical or educational inquiry. Rather, Cremin believes, it is the linkages within and between educational configurations, and the

varied ways in which different people in different places at different times interact with those configurations, that promise to reveal the sources and consequences of American educational experience--past, present, and future.

Cremin's approach to families as educators obviously opens boundless opportunities for historical research to enrich our understanding of how education, broadly conceived, has evolved. By viewing families as active, potent educative agencies throughout their children's development, and by seeing them as part of larger educational configurations, we can begin to develop a history of education directly relevant to the design of family policy today. But I dare not conclude this section on a simple, optimistic note, as if this type of historical research will inevitably move forward, by the force of its own logic. As I stated earlier, I see little reason to think that most educational historians will stop arguing about the role of public schooling long enough to do the resourceful research necessary to understand families as educators. Nor do I see much cause to believe that so-called family historians, who have burgeoned into a distinct historical specialty during the past decade, will abandon their intellectual love affair with statistics for the more qualitative data necessary to write compelling portraits of actual family experience. Every year sees the unearthing of new historical sources containing mountains of quantitative data, and new levels of computer sophistication among family historians; and while the research thereby generated has done much to illuminate the <u>structures</u> of family life in times past, the most sophisticated multiple regression analyses can do little to evoke the actual <u>processes</u> of familial education.[21] Consequently I do not feel optimistic that study of the family as educator will remain anywhere but on the periphery of educational or family history.

Parent Education Programs: Some Persisting Problems

Against this backdrop, my rather skeptical attitude toward parent education programs will surprise no one. Much of the growing interest in parent education stems from an assumption that today's family, unlike those of previous generations, is desperately uncertain about how to rear children and much in need of expert advice in defining and implementing educational goals. As I have argued, however, this assumption is not at all novel and, in fact, has been a recurring refrain throughout the century--long before the bugbear of "cognitive development" emerged in the 1960s to revitalize and reshape it. And much literature on parent education assumes that families are self-contained social and educational units wholly free to direct their children's educational development; whereas new theoretical perspectives on "families and communities as educators" portray families as thoroughly enmeshed in complex educational networks or configurations over which they exercise little independent control. Parent education, then--and note that I am not limiting my remarks to current governmental programs geared solely to the poor, but am referring to all large-scale efforts, whatever the sponsorship or clientele, to upgrade the child-rearing practices of parents--strikes me as a wholly inadequate organizing principle for comprehending or remedying the problems which "parents as educators" face today.

Having said this, I remind you that I am not dogmatically opposed to all parent education programs and that I even helped the PTA design one, with the emphasis on building up parents' confidence and capacities. Clearly I feel that some parent education programs are better than others! Similarly, I realize that children require intelligent, committed, loving care for optimal development, and that parents today--as throughout this century--are actively seeking guidance and assistance in rearing their

young and making family life meaningful. Nonetheless I believe it is essential that proponents of parent education, whatever their particular clientele or instructional method, begin to understand the tendencies toward superficiality and irrelevancy inherent in their method of helping parents perform more effectively. In this final section I want to isolate several of those tendencies indirectly, via historical narrative, particularly the tendency to see parent education as a solution for deeply-rooted social problems; to exaggerate the power of parents alone to control their children's destinies; to delimit women's potential social contribution to the domestic sphere without placing corresponding constraints on men; and to be naively subservient to the latest findings of psychological science. This overview will surely not do justice to the subject, but it will, I hope, shed some light on the difficulty of planning responsible parent education programs.[22]

From the founding of the American colonies, a variety of private and governmental bodies have engaged in what can loosely be termed parent education. In seventeenth-century Massachusetts, for example, individuals called tithingmen were appointed to investigate the family situations of children whose parents were suspected of providing inadequately for their religious and secular education. If the parents were found guilty of neglect and, after being forewarned to educate their offspring, failed to do so, the children could be taken away and placed in other families for proper instruction.

A formal literature to aid parents in child rearing dates back at least to the ancient Greeks, but for present purposes it is necessary to go back only as far as the early nineteenth century, when "advice to parents" books and magazines first appeared in abundance. Addressed to mothers, this literature conveyed one principal message: self-sacrifice. It was woman's duty to sacrifice every desire to the needs of her children and the wants of her

husband. This domestic message formed a major component of what Barbara Welter has termed the "cult of true womanhood," which defined the boundaries of acceptable women's bahavior for most of the nineteenth century, centering the purpose of their existence in home, husband, and children.[23]

While the "domesticity literature" was obviously a form of parent education and reached a wide middle-class audience, it was only toward the end of the century that parent education began to take organized form, first with the creation in New York of the Society for the Study of Child Nature in 1888, and then with the founding in Washington, D.C. of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897. Within two decades the Mothers' Congress claimed nearly two hundred thousand members and, by the late 1920s (by which time it had changed its name to the one we know it by today, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers), membership had skyrocketed to well over a million. Hence its ideas on parent education merit some consideration.

In accordance with the "cult of true womanhood," participants at Mothers' Congress meetings assumed it was woman's divine, biologically-determined function to serve their husbands as "helpmeets" and their children as moral guardians. To aid in this latter task, members held regular "child study" meetings to improve their parenting skills. Their knowledge base was comprised equally of classic educational and moral philosophy (Locke, Rousseau), and more recent scientific writings in medicine and psychology (William James, G. Stanley Hall). An overwhelmingly middle-class organization, the Mothers' Congress stressed the need to disseminate the latest scientific information on children, along with proper values, to the poor. It therefore encouraged members to venture into urban slums and form mothers' groups, in part to convey valuable tips on child rearing, but also to reinforce maternal instincts which, it was thought, poverty tended to erode under the stress of daily life.

Finally, the Mothers' Congress urged members to extend their private family concerns into the political arena in order to improve environmental conditions for children. As the Mothers' Congress saw it, political action and political education were integral to parent education. Any definition of parent education which did not include political action would have been considered narrow and self-serving. In sum, the Mothers' Congress viewed parent education as both a vehicle for disseminating advice on child rearing and as a lever for changing society by organizing mothers in common cause.

Let me reflect briefly on our nation's first major effort to institutionalize parent education. It is clear that the Mothers' Congress espoused a view of women and of sex roles that most people today would find unduly constraining; in addition, that the Mothers' Congress held women responsible for their children's destinies to an extent most people today (I hope) would find appallingly naive and unfair. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the Mothers' Congress went beyond traditional sex-role definitions and extended the sphere of women's legitimate social and political participation. It believed that political action by mothers was essential to children's ultimate well-being, and urged upon all women (not just mothers) a role of citizen-activist that seems even today boldly unconventional, adventuresome, and certainly not sanctioned by the "cult of true womanhood."

A similar tension was evident in the approach of the Mothers' Congress to the nascent sciences of child development. On the one hand, its members considered it essential to communicate to mothers--all mothers, well-to-do and poor alike--the latest medical and psychological research so that all

children might benefit equally. On the other hand, the Mothers' Congress was neither dependent on nor subservient to the mandates of science, and continued to hold traditional religiously and ethically-based precepts on child rearing in equally high regard. In part this may have been because the relevant sciences were not themselves terribly sophisticated, although that is a fact more easily seen in retrospect. Of equal importance, I believe, was that these people still saw the outcomes of child rearing as determined more by the overall household ambiance and moral tone than by specific methods of child nurture. While they did not question the value of new scientific perspectives on children's learning patterns as aids in child rearing, they placed greater trust in mothers' maternal instincts and moral sensibilities.

We thus see in the Mothers' Congress an intriguing balance of perspectives: between the old and the new, between private domestic responsibility and public political activity, between reliance on maternal instincts and traditional morality and reliance on science as guides to effective child rearing. There is surely little reason for nostalgia here; one can easily locate in the Mothers' Congress the origins of many features of parent education I have criticized elsewhere. But it is important to recognize the existence of this balance, these tensions, in the definition and practice of parent education in the pre-World War One period for, as I shall now argue, they disappeared rather quickly from institutionalized efforts at parent education. In the 1920s and 1930s parent education progressed to levels of scientific sophistication undreamed of in late nineteenth century "child study." Yet, in the process of refinement, parent education came to be defined more and more narrowly, self-servingly, and privately as a collection of scientifically-derived nurture techniques to be applied to one's own

children. This heritage, I feel, continues to exert strong influence on parent education literature today, and so I turn your attention to the post-World War One period in somewhat more detail.

The professional field of child development came of age in the 1920s, symbolized best by the founding of several "laboratories" for the scientific study of normal children at such universities as Iowa, Minnesota, Yale, Columbia, Berkeley, and Toronto, and at a number of independently operated and funded centers such as the Merrill-Palmer School. Until fairly recently these laboratories served as launching grounds for most leading child development scholars, many of whom commanded large professional and popular audiences through books, journal articles, and popular magazine pieces--the Spocks, Brazletons, Whites, and Bronfenbrenners of their day. Research at these laboratories was funded in a variety of ways but especially important was money supplied by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, administered by the dynamic Lawrence Frank, which disbursed several million dollars for basic research, supported numerous scholars and graduate students, and kept the laboratories alive during the Depression when they would otherwise have folded.

Unlike most of their counterparts today, but in the tradition of agricultural research stations, the child development laboratories considered popularization and dissemination of science central to their missions. Surely for some this was the "price" they had to pay for receiving state and foundation funding; but, if we may judge from the energy expended and the enthusiasm conveyed, many researchers genuinely saw their work as contributing directly to a popular social movement with the potential for radically transforming how Americans reared their children. As one might expect, this was especially the case at the state universities. Child psychologists such as

Bird Baldwin at Iowa, John Anderson at Minnesota, and Harold Jones at Berkeley organized, led, and attempted to evaluate (with considerably less success) large-scale projects in parent education in order to communicate the latest scientific findings to mothers. Concern for dissemination was equally great at private centers such as the Institute for Euthenics at Vassar and the Merrill-Palmer School, whose original name--the Merrill-Palmer Motherhood and Homemaking School--nicely captured its concern with parental and preparental education in addition to basic research.

While university scholars played a prominent role in post-World War One parent education, the most effective leadership and the key to transforming parent education into a mass movement was the enthusiastic sponsorship of diverse lay women's organizations. These groups showed virtual reverence for university scholars as authorities on child rearing. Under prodding by the experts, they urged mothers to abandon the myth of maternal instinct and follow instead--at pain of doing their children irreparable harm--the dictates of science in all aspects of child rearing, from toilet training to sibling rivalry to sex instruction. No organization was numerically more important than the PTA, but more influential in providing leadership and adding intellectual respectability to the parent education movement was the Child Study Association of America (successor to the Society for the Study of Child Nature). Under the guidance of such remarkably devoted women as Sidonie Gruenberg, Josette Frank, Cecile Pilpel, Marion Miller, and Anna Wolf, the CSAA sponsored the first university course in parent education, organized dozens of conferences to determine the most effective means to disseminate scientific research, published books and pamphlets on all aspects of child rearing (as well as a sophisticated monthly journal), pioneered in the use of radio as a tool of parent education, and initiated the National

Council of Parent Education to coordinate the many lay and professional groups in the field. In addition to the CSAA, other powerful women's organizations invested heavily in parent education, notably the American Home Economics Association and the American Association of University Women. Finally, several new journals and magazines addressed to children's education and parents' problems appeared in the 1920s, of which the most popular was Parents' Magazine. Suffice it for now to make two points about Parents' Magazine: first, the linkage between it and child psychologists could not have been clearer, for it was published conspicuously with the imprimatur of the research laboratories at Minnesota, Yale, Iowa, and Columbia; and second, the magazine was the only major periodical whose circulation moved continuously upward during the Depression, certainly impressive testimony to its popularity. Under the auspices and guidance of these several organizations and magazines, hundreds of thousands of women--mainly middle-class--met regularly to discuss in small groups the latest scientific findings on child development, hoping thereby to find answers to specific problems and also, no doubt, solace in a shared maternal identity.

It is impossible now to do justice to the varieties of psychological advice disseminated under the aegis of the parent education movement, but a quick synopsis can at least suggest the drift of the ideas (I shall beg the more difficult question about actual impact on parental behavior). The 1920s saw the repudiation of both nonscientific child-rearing texts (Locke, Rousseau) and publications of late nineteenth-century "child-study" (especially Hall), and the triumph of diverse behavioristic and mental health psychologies. While the child's emotional development received considerable attention, the emphasis was nonetheless generally on strict habit formation, particularly in the preschool years. If parents did not establish proper behavior patterns very early, there was little hope that later reeducation would make them worthy, contented, and successful citizens.

Experts offered parents lengthy lists of "do's" and "don'ts," all purportedly derived from scientific study of children. My favorite list was contained in an article by pioneer juvenile court judge and parent educator Miriam Van Waters, on "Nineteen Ways of Being a Bad Parent" (later included, appropriately enough, in her book Parents on Probation).[24] But positive as well as negative rules were also commonly presented to parents, sanctioned by the age-old maxim that "prevention is better than cure." Parents were enjoined not to let affection divert the application of scientific nurture techniques; indeed, parents were sometimes seen as impediments to healthy growth. What most endangered optimal child development, according to the experts, were outmoded customs and inconsistencies based on parents' natural tendency to sentimentalize children and trust to a non-existent maternal instinct. The only way mothers could overcome these dangerous tendencies was to devote themselves selflessly to their children by becoming students of science. Motherhood was a full-time, no-nonsense occupation, a "profession" requiring as careful scientific preparation and as much time as any in which men excelled. The main outside, "public" activities for which mothers could legitimately spare time were those connected to children's immediate growth needs, such as proper, "scientific" selection of toys, music teachers, clothes, movies, friends, and so forth. Only such devotion, study, and meticulous application of scientific rules within the household nest, experts warned, would save children later emotional and behavioral problems--"maladjustments," in new 1920s scientific jargon.

In sum, via the parent education movement psychological science was widely disseminated to mothers in the 1920s, and stressed the extraordinary amount of control they exercised over their children's futures. The intellectual concerns of mothers were directed almost entirely within the family

circle, and emphasized their abilities as executors of scientific mandates. When children failed to mature properly, it was assumed to be the mothers' fault and, moreover, science could pinpoint the precise cause. Mothers beware!

The nursery school best embodied the new ideal of mothers' subservience to experts in child psychology. The main objective of the early nursery schools was to provide mothers with object lessons in scientific child nurture. Representatives of nursery schools stressed the plasticity of early childhood and, in line with findings from the child development laboratories, the irreversibility of traits instilled then. Indulgence of bad habits in such areas as eating, sleeping, socializing, and displays of anger or fear would result inevitably in permanent "maladjustments." One way to prevent this was to remove children from exclusive control of their mothers for a few hours on weekdays, for the dual purpose of instilling correct habits in the children and, equally central, teaching their mothers how to do so at home. The nursery school did not in the least attempt to offer mothers free time to pursue careers; indeed, quite the contrary, the nursery school was to reinforce the larger message of the parent education movement that motherhood was a full-time, precarious profession manageable only under direction by experts. Mothers were consequently expected to be active observers of the up-to-date professional training their children received. In effect, both mothers and their children were sent to nursery school.

This brief sketch of parent education in the post-World War One period can only begin to outline its contours, texture, style, and appeal, but I think it provides sufficient information to suggest several parallels between past and present. As in the 1920s, there has recently been a tremendous outpouring of professional and popular literature urging parents to apply the most "modern" methods of child rearing, at risk of doing permanent injury

to their children.[25] As in the 1920s--although with more of an emphasis on cognitive skills--there is great stress on the preschool years and the irreversibility of patterns established then. As in the 1920s, parent education has focused almost exclusively on mothers, even while, in both periods, denying the existence of maternal instinct. The prime intent has been to teach mothers to perform traditional, private, female role functions more efficiently, and to convince them that motherhood is as worthy, useful, and professionally demanding as any occupation found outside the home. Finally, in both periods parent educators have assumed that parental behavior is the singlemost important determinant of a child's future happiness and success. In each of these continuities between past and present, I believe, there is tension and perhaps outright conflict between the concepts of "parent education" and "family as educator" which might serve as one focus of our conference discussions.

There are, to be sure, notable differences as well--the switch in emphasis from the affective to the cognitive realm, the growing role of government in sponsoring research and dissemination, and the recent interest in parent training programs as potential equalizers of educational opportunity for children of the poor. But these changes do not subtract substantially from the basic continuities in approach and design. Contrary to the impression sometimes given by its current supporters, parent education has a long history in this country. I suggest that we examine that history more carefully or risk, in our benign ignorance, reinventing the past while seeking simplistic solutions to the complex problems of families as educators.

NOTES

1. Steven L. Schlossman, Love and the American Delinquent: The Theory and Practice of "Progressive" Juvenile Justice, 1825-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Steven Schlossman and Stephanie Wallach, "The Crime of Precocious Sexuality: Female Juvenile Delinquency in the Progressive Era," Harvard Educational Review 48 (February 1978), 65-94; Steven Schlossman, "End of Innocence: Science and the Transformation of Progressive Juvenile Justice, 1899-1917," History of Education 7 (October 1978), 207-18; Steven L. Schlossman, "Before Home Start: Notes Toward a History of Parent Education in America, 1897-1929," Harvard Educational Review 46 (August 1976), 436-67; Steven Schlossman, "The Parent Education Game: The Politics of Child Psychology in the 1970s," Teachers College Record 79 (May 1978), 788-808.

2. Today's Family in Focus (Chicago: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1977).

3. For helpful discussion of related themes during the past several years, I want to thank especially W. Norton Grubb.

4. Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Who Needs Parent Education?," Teachers College Record 79 (May 1978), 767-87.

5. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970).

6. Kenneth Keniston and The Carnegie Council on Children, All Our Children (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 4.

7. "For the last hundred years it is the grandparents who have seen more change than any generation in the history of the world....Today's parents of young children were born into the world of TV, computers, space exploration, the bomb, and they have seen much less change than their parents and their grandparents." Margaret Mead, "Grandparents as Educators," in Hope Jensen Leichter, ed., The Family as Educator (New York: Teachers College Press, 1977), p. 70.

8. Laura Lein, Administrator, Working Family Project, Work and Family Life (Preliminary Report, 1974).

9. Mary Jo Bane, Here to Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), pp. 19, 35.

10. Lawrence A. Cremin, "The Family as Educator: Some Comments on the Recent Historiography," in Leichter, ed., The Family as Educator, pp. 76-91; and Lawrence A. Cremin, "Family-Community Linkages in American Education: Some Comments on the Recent Historiography," Teachers College Record 79 (May 1978), 683-704.

11. Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Lawrence A. Cremin, The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley: An Essay in the Historiography of American Education (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965).

12. See Diane Ravitch, The Revisionists Revised (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978).

13. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977).

14. Martin H. Quitt, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of the American Family: The Perspective of a Family Historian and Psychohistorian," Journal of Psychohistory 4 (Summer 1976), 101-10.

15. Timothy L. Smith, "Immigrant Social Aspirations and American Education, 1880-1930," American Quarterly 21 (Fall 1969), 523-43; Josef J. Barton, Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); John W. Briggs, An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

16. John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene J. Genovese, Roll,Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Thomas L. Webber, Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865 (New York: Norton, 1978).

17. Lawrence A. Cremin, American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783 (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

18. I draw especially on Cremin's attempt to state his theoretical position in Public Education (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), and to demonstate its application concisely in Traditions of American Education (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

19. Cremin, "Family-Community Linkages in American Education: Some Comments on the Recent Historiography," p. 701.

20. Cremin, Traditions of American Education, p. 142.

21. Note the near absence of concern with educational issues in the most comprehensive collection of the genre, Michael Gordon, ed., The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective, second edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978).

22. The following comments draw on my research in progress as well as on my two published pieces on parent education, past and present; see note 1.

23. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly (Summer 1966), pp. 151-74.

24. Miriam Van Waters, Parents on Probation (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1927).

25. K. Alison Clarke-Stewart, "Popular Primers for Parents," American Psychologist 33 (April 1978), 359-69.